

# The Marketing Process

Just like finishing, growing your brand is a process.

“As manufacturers, we are so good at improving manufacturing processes, reducing waste and engineering solutions, but we don’t spend near enough time focusing on what happens upstream from when we receive the purchase order. But why don’t we? That’s a process too.”

So says Mike Katz, who along with his wife and a dedicated team of employees owns Molded Dimensions Inc., a progressive and successful company that engineers and molds custom rubber and polyurethane mechanical parts for OEM and aftermarket industries. His comment above, made to me in a meeting not long ago, really stuck.

Katz’s point is that manufacturing people love manufacturing. Finishing people love finishing. We love the science that allows us to start with a steel substrate and convert it into a beautiful part with practical applications. And we love finding more efficient methods for doing so. When it comes to marketing, though, most are a little less passionate, perhaps for a couple of reasons.

First, although most of us know marketing is important, and we know doing it will be good for our business, and we know we should do it, we never get to it. In the sea of expedited orders, equipment failures, demanding customers and employee issues, marketing can always wait until tomorrow. So it does.

And many finishers are reluctant to invest money in something so intangible. Invest in a new powder line with a definable payback period for a new customer with contracted revenue? Do that all day long. Hire another engineer who can

help us improve our process and reduce cost? You bet. Spend money on a marketing program to grow our brand, improve our image and perhaps double our revenue? Well ...

You get the picture. But it’s so easy. Start by defining your *value proposition*. I advocate ranking customers

on a scale of 1 to 10 on the basis of the three Ms: margin, maintenance and magnitude. The fact is, some customers are just more profitable, easier to work with and provide higher volumes of business than do others. After ranking customers on these three factors, add up the scores and see which customers score the highest. These are your best customers. Ask them what they love about working with you. I suggest that the answers they provide define your value proposition.

For example, one finisher I know well engaged in this exercise and determined that her organization’s on-time delivery, ability to meet tough appearance specifications,

standardized quality system and relentless customer service was what defined its value proposition.

The value proposition defined, it must then be communicated to customers and prospects. In a world where a cold call almost never results in a productive meeting, and cold voicemails and emails sent to prospects rarely elicit a response, we need a better way to market. To that end, consider these marketing ideas for manufacturers:

**Search Engine Optimization (SEO).** An SEO consultant engaged for less than \$500 can identify what keywords prospects use when searching online for a company like yours. Nearly 85 percent of the time, people using a search engine click on one of the first three results. To move your site up in rank, make sure its content includes the right words and that it is linked strategically to and from as many other related sites as possible.

**Email newsletters.** One day last week, 13 marketing emails arrived in my inbox, another five were routed to junk and a whopping 234 were caught by my external spam filter. With all this traffic, I was surprised to learn that 24 percent of blast emails are actually opened by the manufacturing industry recipient. Select a free platform (MailChimp is one example), sign up for a free account, upload the email addresses of your contacts, choose a template, write your content and send the email. It’s that easy. Then track the statistics of who opens the email, whether they visit your website and what they read when they visit.

**Content marketing.** With 80 percent of decision makers preferring to get company information in a series of articles versus traditional marketing, many marketers are turning to “content marketing.” Content marketing delivers relevant and educational information to current and potential customers. Sharing a current customer success story via a case study, publishing a research paper or posting a “how to” video to YouTube are fantastic ways to expose your company to prospects, even on a tight budget. I recently heard someone ask the question, “What if customers and prospects actually looked forward to receiving your marketing material?” Content marketing can create that result.



MATTHEW KIRCHNER, CEO  
American Finishing Resources, LLC  
mkirchner@afrnw.com

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**Customer satisfaction surveys.** As a marketing tool? Absolutely. Many companies send out the ISO-required survey asking sanitized questions about quality, delivery, service, etc. Boring! Why not skip the emailed survey that about three out of 100 of your customers actually take the time to complete and instead conduct the survey in person. While you're at it, pull out a copy of your value proposition and ask your customers to rank each item. This becomes a great way to make sure your value prop still resonates with your customers, and it reinforces the value you provide in the mind of your customer—every year.

**Be the expert.** Prospects hate to be sold, but many love to learn. Years ago, when a new governmental regulation required major changes for companies in his market, a colleague of mine spent an entire weekend studying the new rules and prepared a presentation on how the changes would affect his prospects. Instead of leaving voicemails begging for sales visits, he sent emails offering to deliver his presentation at no charge. Suddenly prospects that never returned calls and wouldn't let him past the gatekeeper were imploring him to pay a visit. On what topics could your prospects use a primer?

Though my list of creative marketing ideas could go on for pages, those listed here are great places to start. Coating a production part is a process. So is marketing. Attend to it with the same degree of enthusiasm and attention to detail, and marvel at the results. ■■■

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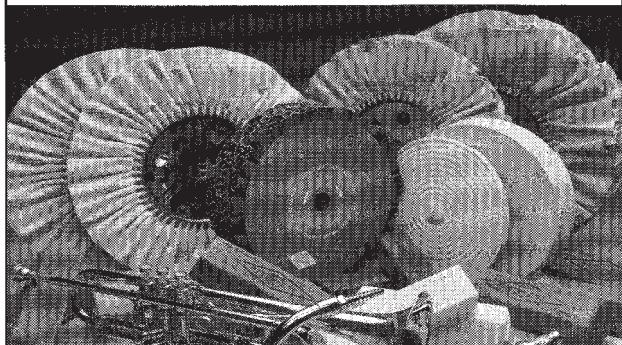
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